SHIFT DRINKS

Jonathon Todd

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Shift Drinks
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SHIFT DRINK 1/4

48 hours is long enough for the veil to lift / I think that's what they mean by armageddon / Injecting magic in the hope of something eventful / reading Emma's essays on violence / What's a few broken turnstiles in light of consumption? Or history, a circle leaves you without close ties to the land / not property / But a place to be / increase of abuse & isolation products of products / I had a home once Now overrun we rebuild only as commons / we are told master the self / but I don't believe in it / lived with its mumbled insecurities following me across the highways to this stoop / Pop music on repeat / a sink full of things to be cleaned / it's damaging to believe in this illusion / yet / here I am making little marks on paper.

MYSTERIOUS BOOM

Mysterious boom in south Philly
    ruins our collective sleep.

This is my body,
    covered in slush
    sitting on the same spot:
    clueless, restless &
    craving an out.

I'll live here in words, squash them like clay,

looking to the frost to change to air
    so I can lean back and derail.
I think the noise was all of us,
    pressing out against the walls,
    drinking our work in long pulls
    and spitting into the stars.

Go ahead get out of work.
Unlock the kitchens, cook all the food.
Run out of small talk,
    emerge from this stupor
    with a million looks.

Yeah, I think that's it:
    the boom of satori,
    the boom of beatitude—

a deep rest after the fall.

TAXI

In my dreams Charon is a cab driver,
    we're always stuck in traffic.
Work was nothing, simply dull,
but who are you, with your hand on my thigh?
    Is it after a connected path?
See my neighbor dizzy in the window.
You showed me a house and we crouched down
    to see an old tv through the glass,
script in another language we roll on the grass,
place our hands on a hinge, push open the dust
    and crawl inside.
    It smells like nothing—
this room is just a holding space
or a conversation we're not going to have.
In this dream we want the unspoken.
Lulling, we have to pick up the pace.
I leave in a rush like I'm always leaving out the mess
    and pass out in the door.
Strangers pick me up and it feels familiar like an old stumble and suddenly
    I'm aware of the dream.

SELF PORTRAIT OF ABUSE

In the first photo, I'm cross-legged next to a table
with a chessboard and a bottle of scotch,

bishops in my shirt pocket, hair messy.
(Earlier we were in a park
        sitting on an old swing set—
    I tell you this is necessary
for handling my karma)

Overfilled tilts into focus
    a pinhole glance. The night before
I encourage you to join and
everything is wet my tongue is always
saturated. Is there such a thing
as a perfected movement? The thing is

I remember laying my head over glass and
the frame looked like where I spent my summers and—

The room gave in like a sharp grip.
Still have a love of tall glass bottles
In the photo, I'm so sure it's close,
    I know what I'm doing,
Bus ride like a warm bath.
        I strip in the stalls with carnival music
Elevating, pulling, and pulling.
I want to distill this into an action,
Call it consumption, make it attractive,
        Which step is this?

The one where we're playing chess and the music Is on?
How to stretch out bark so it's

Edible, full, and absent?

I like that the window felt familiar,
I like the root of that word,

I like its absence.

PANIC

All it took was an extra eternity
looking through the glass of this elevator,
unlocking a cage, a whiff of oak and bourbon.
Foxhole of the faithless with a young medic
putting pressure on the wound.

It's just a phase—
30 years long with a 10-year gap.

Like it's 10 am in the summer
look up at little rays breaking into webs
naked with a radio playing some sound
that bakes and rises like a quiet slice of hope.

All it took was turning around too quickly /a dizzy flash.

What's different?
What did I used to do?
Oh, that's right,
I would swallow an empire
just to throw it back up in the morning.

SHIFT DRINK 2-4

Cold enough to caffeinate the air / after tossing paper out / catching words & warmth It's back to this place / 8 years of rolling stones / & hiding in rooms / listening to the Clash / sending messages around like sling-shot Obstructions / heat cool enough to blow on / absentmindedly / break down boxes / Notice a new scratch on the wall / bounce corks against the window / Drink another coffee / lift another bottle/ blink & pull streams across a frigid sky / Everything becomes an object of desire / split time & sense / a solo silhouetted performance / Sub rosa / where we build & build & build in silence making their indifference into comical song.

THE POPE COMES TO PHILLY

The city prepares as it always does—
    erecting fences, baking rolls, selling t-shirts.
We're told to stay inside and watch screens
     while everyone gets ready to sell out.

Bodies aware of their temporary state
    paint picket signs as giant TVs get
    put up with lights & restrictions.
They are moving quietly toward a language
    of memory. An exodus, exclusive,
    while the wealthy complain about traffic
     and the rest of us are missing work.

Where is the real sermon, Padre?
Where is your white-washed christ?
Behind the fences looking in?
In an armored car to protect the heart?
Where do you speak from?
Where is the revolution we were promised?

The first fall will be ancient as we look
    to a cooler wind and take out our trash.
A prayer will be said while they count money,
    carry cakes & drink wine. And when the city
erupts, drops gates & burns the light
    in smoky effigy (castles of cardboard)
    we will ignore it all.

AFTER ANALYSIS

What I meant to say
was clear /corrupted.

Like, look at this comparison: says,

No, it's late.

Eyes betray me, look: I gave agency to flesh—

But what I meant to say
was I exhausted myself
to pass out, to pass the time,
twirling a cigarette to hail the darkness,
always picturing movement

because what I'm trying to say is still / silence.

As if motivation is a secret,
sugar secreting from a pear,
what I mean to say is two things
coming together like a glance,
like a glass of milk.

What I wanted to say was whiskey,
sound of a crack opening bottles.
What I really mean is a door has multiple parts.
What I really mean is I'm apart,
indivisible sections laid out on a rug.
What I mean is some part of me would see these pieces,
another part would just bang them together
to make sparks.

This reminds me of the wild
& this is me not admitting it,
& this is isolation of myth,
& this is my exit

THE GALLERY

I'm dizzy, history being public,
buy a coke. Stairs lead up
to fragments full of quotes.

Self-empowerment is how / capital makes you feel good.

Brown wood and leather flaps
as the wind knocks around
bullets and dye suspended in flood lights.

Everything is performance.
"Everything is performance."
Sucks on affluence/
runs dry

The micro is atomic traded between gaps.
Power lives in the public,
In nome i patri
Et fille

and the holy host of
cracked bones, tosses shoes,
brick scattered under ensos
and halo beams
Ha-le-lu-ja

Mouth half open pulls away
decadent laugh,
lounge full of self-help hailing the sky,
tripping over makeshift borders
guarded, always guarded

by well-dressed men.

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR ANXIETY

Learn to extract blues from the sky
Up your consumption of water
Study forms of talk or breathing
Let the sun burn through your skin

Send out a mass message to the airways
    regarding a dim lit drawing you did last night
Learn to be passive and cut down on coffee
Cross your legs and daydream of consequence
Please notice every detail like the shadow of
    your hand across this page (the leaves flickering
    the high-pitched trucks almost out of reach)

Be awed by Times Square sucking light out of the city
Be prepared for your yearly review
    your inefficiency has been documented
I'm grateful I have a name for you
I keep it to myself over the cheers of some crowd

Be thankful we haven't done our worst
Be thankful we haven't figured you out

THANKS FOR COMING

Give us the space to work
around this grease stain.
May I have my record back?
You leaned onto a late snowfall
full of heat and sank as quickly
into water. What do we make
of elementary things? Belly of a temple
is wherever we place ourselves, or
peel back something, like layers,
revel in revealing. Consumed,
we get sticky hands bound to the walls,
to the roads, to the railings, help
to push up. We could break in
just off of memory, shatter our guard
by signing our full intentions.

SHIFT DRINK 3/4

This isn't an astute observation / followed by erratic speech trailing off / to stare in the park / at lights disconnected as disconnected does / I get the need for jubilance confused with missing things / we get grounded to keep from flames / ash is wood / wood is ash / & night is the time to pass notes to these empty streets / or work on desire as a form of cleaning / a pile of letters / rejections / of the material / you don't need you want / no / fuck you for usurping desire / sing hallelujah for the discounted bodies en mass / we move without agency / we run out of options & time / & slow / enough to pull seconds taut / make an instrument out of moments.

THIS IS CITY HALL

The subway isn't an absolute—
dispensing cups and strobe lights,

backpack hanging/chewing
gum past stops. I'm overcrowded,

bored, slip fingers into split cotton,
read the river like a sutra,

skip the lesson for a space.
Call 215-Got-Hurt

for free consultation:
Hello? I saw your sign

can we talk about it?
This is city hall.

Underneath,
stone can't imagine

blowing open the ground
or standing on top.

Portraits of the beautiful
spending money, being happy

(*samsara* is the word I think).
When is the next line,

crouched in snow,
peas on the tile,

salt for the curious
and the saints.

WHAT?

Used to drive
15 miles to swallow God,
back out of an agreement, re-
arrange all the meanings.

The first half of
the blue book reads like a novel,
then we start demanding
the linear and material.

Did you ever sneak away from ritual
for a cigarette? Plant your hands on
something older than a thought?

Days staring at the wall.
I want a tongue

delirious of language,
jumping the fence and boredom
(which is just time to breathe, time
away from movement.)

Some of the early ideas of prison
were to cure idleness. Take a breath,
you might see past the illusion.
You might, for example,

pass out flowers to strangers,
spend vast amounts of time
naked in bed, refuse to click on the clock.
You might even quit your job,
laugh when someone asks "what's
next?" and whatever it is

it's ordinary and ordained
by a long fall night.

BROKEN PIPES

Couldn't ladle out
pinched tones a half curtain
of bets, legs crossed against
tarps hung over paintings,
projected candles, flame eats
everything. Stuck around
long enough to chew on it.
No anxious stimulation
lays out what we claw at.
Someday we'll get this
sound right, print out sheets
& dissolve in bloom, sitting
on steps, complaining
about the wind. Call out
of work, call out of, call
out. Space hugs this eye.
Ever get the sense that
something is happening?
Another glass gets spots,
sink full of broken pipes
howls by. All of it too
steady, too light,
too passive.

ONE

unveiling one turn burns
scuff marks on stucco walls

avalanche practice inverts
calmly collecting debris naked

as a stop light feels October as
a memory a pilgrimage of

quick movement succumbs
to dance the number 10, a decade,

decadent wash rolls down
broad yellow bands of paint drawing

air from a vacuum the policy
is always absent of people

dragging feet and bags full of
cardboard industry turning despite

a lack of light tacks paper to the walls
inscriptions in place of somewhere to go

converts above ground as a moment
of clarity without the word

passing for the compact stops
to receive carbonated thoughts

like ritual refresh the scenery
as a point of view hovering

above plastic click again a call
echoes from somewhere

as a song among it all.

INTRAVENOUS

If the fear is silence,
raise the word with pitch
and burn incense. Talk about fear
while trying to stay warm and full,
watching the retroactive lights
reverberate, the disappearing act
of simplicity and boredom.

The last drink I had was at a bar in a train station/
before I tipped the long stem of a wine bottle
and fell asleep in a stunned position.

A half-eaten Reuben in a diner
with a bleeding stomach and a heart
that moved against its interest &
when time repeats and the lights go out
I laid on my kitchen floor screaming /
the tips of my fingers burning.

I would breathe and gasp
shooting up with electric fear.
& when I saw it coming again
I would lie down
clutching the elusive fabric
serene with silence.
I would watch you play music
trying to hold onto a note or a word.

What did I see then?

But the bright lights from
the back of a cab really did me in.
I'm not sure what captivity feels like
but I know the fear of against my will,
dragging my feet across the floor
& making perfect mathematical circles
with outstretched arms.

Shock is a word I'll wield more delicately now,
restart no longer a moral code.

What morality lies in visions?

When they shut the lights off
& you see movement where there shouldn't be any?
When you cry out for visions &
grab for the inexplicable &
light holds purpose that hurts your chest?

They take notes:

"This will be an interesting case."

& I'll forever
hate my lack of understanding
and seeing that look again.
Making peace with the lack of light
because it made more sense than movement.
No calm or understanding
just submission that was tired of trying.
And now there are ghosts in the music
as I search for seeds in this lemon,
water boiling on the stove,
flashes of steam blowing upwards across the city,
the same city I watched from a window
while they made grave pronouncements
from behind walls.

It's easy to whisper in front of the deaf
    but much harder to hide your music.
You can feel vibrations
before you even speak, or listen.

And all I'd listen to was piano.
I would ask for tea long after
everyone had gone to sleep,
the refrain being isolation.
Dipping the tea bag,

I'd watch water coming off the bottom,
relearning gravity in a dull but comfortable purgatory,
wishing for a cigarette or some incense to burn.
It's amazing then that I didn't think of Rome,
or some dusty cathedral,
or the oceans,
or a field.

I couldn't think of anything but air
& even that was just remembering to breathe.

Now I sit smoking,
the air is a different bit of magic now,
    cold and even.
I sip tea, catching the heat rising as I fall.
Not the usual blur of stupid happy information
    nor the creeping fear of my skin plotting against me.

Not a state of grace nor agony.
    Just a little confusion
and a clear look over my shoulder
    to where the music grows.

SHIFT DRINK 4/4

When was the first time? / are you even born yet / tumbling through as an accident / lungs that fold onto themselves / church that folds its hands behind their backs / or / is it sound eminating from everywhere / your dumb curiosity / heightened / a lack of understanding of the material / Maybe you learn about objects hurtling through space / when the can hits the back of your head / or / you learn how to lay stone / start piecing things together / like value / or / how time can stand still if you focus / /or / learning to read intention in a crowded room / so that your first descent is an aimless accident / you learn to push, pull, & stumble / or / is it brief preparation for intention / or / is it the freedom to destroy activity? / or / is it collective memory dragging its hair behind our backs?

MAY DAY

8 hours for work
8 hours for rest
8 hours for what we will

24 hours for what we will
It isn't hard after labor to search for music,
to trace lines in these tiles,
but what you're saying is suspect.

Go ahead and hang up on the boss.

It's 2 pm on Tuesday
    & my concept of time spits on meaning.
Take in air to clear the scrolling lines
    & collect water on the temple.

I tell myself I have to produce these lines to be productive.

Subway pulls up,
    get wrapped around yourself,
    leaning into motion, catching
    the quiet end of shifts
    kicking boots into the aisles.
A Wilhelmm scream

& stops announced
    between sunflower seeds & gossip.

I alternate like a broken switch.
Recovery starts with a phone call,
    starts with adrenaline,
    starts with crimson staircases
    stacked on myth,
    on scaffold watch towers
    grabbing siren echoes—

Today I have a great joy in doing nothing.

ART

Don't call it addiction
call it how to reboot a dream.
After the battery of bone density,
you've got time to think & push
mechanized repetition. Pick your
favorite brick out of a million.

What we do to the temporal (can I
get a smoke?). It's the temperature
that starts to fuck you up. At first
outbursts, maybe tacking sheets
to the walls and downing jack /
inventing language as a way out

& so goes the city even now
absent any meaning. Missed
a good chance, sleep showered
over bundled carpet in the rain,
presses like thought / or space / or
to study something is to forget it.

Who says you can't shape
geography in words? Through
some parting in a memory like
if we found it, would we know
where we are? Ideation in front
of a moving train, Baudelaire

letting his soup get cold,
instructions with assembly, like
2 years & a wave of the hand,
comic misdirection. Look over here

I've discovered waterlogged papers
with "Good-Bye" written all over them.

Maybe a prophet tired of being
spoken to, gaps of plotlines/jump cuts
of every same-such-fucking-neon-signs.
Dried out on a blue carpet October 4th,
2018, so hard to walk away from anything
(still owe the hospital 5K) the on/off switch

is getting worn by the day, I'm slipping up,
letting the non-passive voice clock into work:
"Fuck your Xmas party, we need a raise."
Stranger than watching fruit rot (If you see a
banana taped to the wall: Take it) & everything
IS art until you trade it around like stocks.

I still have my addictions too! Batting away
smoke towards a long string of...nevermind.
Tumbling like burnt ice, beneath me they're
tearing up the floorboards, looking for
a way to raise the rent. I feel dumber
every fucking day spent in nostalgic porn

for language and thought, a cynical breed,
cracked loaves of bread expectant of
something like the precipice of a good drink.
Folded over a mix, moving in even tighter
circles around the center. Call it one, call it
massive, call it something happening yeah?

Despite itself, "in the name of" another
authoritative stamp replicating what was said.
But any good religion starts with yelling into the sky
And that's bottom-up motherfucker!
I'm being careless with my time, not my fault.

I didn't invent seconds, minutes, or hours

nor metal nor sharpened points as an imprint
of a decaying sun. Disgusted yet breathing.
Understand the basics: It's true! It's true!
The treasure WAS always in you. Fuck it.
Steal the gold back anyway. Why is it
always on us to have an epiphany?

SACRE COEUR

I hid my bottle behind a trash can
outside of the church (a sin,
however small). We entered the quiet,
removed our hats, and looked up
without fear. You could still hear
muttered prayers offered up, our
over-complicated sorrows and rage
placed upon a golden cross
with a few still looking up for a reprieve.

In a corner, I drop a coin into the offering box,
strike a match and light a candle,
smoky frescoes of saints looking down,
always looking down as we look up,
not humble but longing. I sigh
and walk around the altar, a table
with its inedible bread and wine.
The body of the self can't be eaten,
    only forgotten.

You step outside & suddenly it's brighter.
There is a view from the city steps
and music from somewhere. The bottle
is still there, & you recall all the offerings
you made for yourself. As your feet
get numb moving down more stairs,
the somber paintings recede, all the suffering
we place elsewhere now afraid to call out.
And you look over the city, not sure where the wall ends
    or where the street will lead you tonight.
        C'est Bien.

SHIFT DRINK 8-4

It's like cold as a holding place for hunger / occupied theater / overcast & cafes / phone calls and heat / understated / kicks on / flame fashioned from long walks / between the hallways of this building / call it surveillance & a passive meal/ blades & the knowledge of oxygen as space / somewhere other than here / memory hands out business cards/ subway platforms / secret maps/ vibrations/ announcements from city hall/ language as occupations/ curfews and obsolete distance/ production as finite rage / the universal vanishing point/ debt as milk & things scattered / collection / collective / correction as windows / show don't tell / as abstractions / show your work / as mosaics of broken glass / fuck this state / show your work / everyday piecemeal / pickup the city / useless metaphors / sell us hunger & cold / the city / the empty / the absurd / show your work

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Jonathon Todd is a poet, musician, Buddhist, anarchist and generally confused individual. His poems attempt to find moments between and within labor, fusing ideas about emptiness, collectivity, and absurdity. His work has been featured in *Prolit* and *Protean Magazine* among others.